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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2770
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002465

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE VIOLENCE AHEAD IN SUCRE

REF: A. LA PAZ 2333

[1](#)B. LA PAZ 2406

Classified By: DCM Kris Urs for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Pro- and anti-government forces are converging on Sucre, seat of the Constituent Assembly, poised and prepared to clash with each other in Sucre's streets on September 10 (if not sooner). The debate over restoring Sucre as Bolivia's full capital (it is currently only home to judiciary) is the main catalyst for the potential conflict. While claiming impartiality, government officials and members of the ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party continue to encourage groups who openly oppose Sucre's restoration to march on Sucre. As a result, residents of Sucre and Chuquisaca department (where Sucre is located) do not view the central government as an impartial mediator. Since September 5, the television images from Sucre have started to look like the Palestinian "Intifada" with students throwing rocks, tires burning in the streets, and the police retaliating with copious amounts of tear gas. Meanwhile, on September 6, President Evo Morales rather than trying to defuse the situation "unveiled" an alleged plot to topple his government, arguing the events transpiring in Sucre are part of the plot. End Summary.

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The Pro-Sucre Position
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Since August 15, Sucre residents have been protesting a resolution passed by MAS delegates and a few opposition representatives from La Paz. The resolution struck the issue of debating the return of full capital status to Sucre from the Constituent Assembly's agenda. Protesters view the resolution as illegal, since it passed by simple majority rather than the required two-thirds majority (ref A). Members of the "Junta Democratica" (Democracy Board), a conglomeration of opposition groups that support the Sucre's restoration and oppose the Morales government

have made several demands including, the annulment of the August 15 resolution and that all Constituent Assembly decisions require a two-thirds majority. The Board also insists that all negotiations regarding the status of Sucre be negotiated in Sucre. September 10 is the Board's declared deadline. Opposition members in congress have told poloffs that they expect violence on or before September 10.

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The Government's Position
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13. (SBU) MAS officials argue the Democracy Board is anti-democratic and is actively conspiring to topple the Morales administration. Meanwhile, government and MAS officials continue to encourage allied groups -- labor and indigenous groups as well as citizens of the hugely pro-MAS city of El Alto -- to march on Sucre to defend the MAS' proposals at the Constituent Assembly. Pro-MAS groups state they will have 100,000 people in Sucre by September 10. Opposition sources state this estimate is high, but nonetheless are concerned about the large mobilization of pro-MAS groups. These same sources state the MAS is paying protesters to march on Sucre in support of their aims. The MAS counter-accuses the opposition of financing its supporters. (Note: Both sides are probably correct. End Note).

14. (SBU) Adding further fuel to the fire, President Morales, on September 6 unveiled an alleged plot to topple him. The government alleges the plan was devised by a radical Santa Cruz group called the "Nacion Camba," and states the plan is called the "Plan to Topple the (Expletive Deleted) Indian." According to the government, the plot's main objective is to foment so much conflict within Bolivia that President Morales is forced to resign. A component of the alleged plan is for radical youth from Santa Cruz to support (with violence) Sucre's demand for full capital status. The Nacion Camba's end goal, as stated by the government, is to install Potosi mayor Rene Joaquin Cabrero as president.

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Weak Calls for Dialogue
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15. (SBU) The government has offered on several occasions to sponsor talks calling for representatives from both sides of the capital issue (La Paz and Sucre) to meet in a so called neutral site (Cochabamba or Potosi). Supporters of Sucre do not view the central government as an impartial intermediary. In fact Chuquisaca Prefect David Sanchez, a member of the government's MAS party, resigned his post criticizing the government's lack of serious efforts to defuse the situation (ref B). Referring to September 10, Sanchez also stated that he did not want to be responsible for "the imminent and near confrontation that could result in (many) injuries and death."

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Changing the Venue
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16. (SBU) On September 6, Presidential spokesman Alex Contreras offered new options to resolve the conflict. Contreras suggested that Constituent Assembly could be temporarily closed until the capital question were resolved, or as an alternative he recommended that the Constituent Assembly move to a new location, such as Oruro or Potosi. PODEMOS, the main opposition party in the Constituent Assembly and Congress declared that moving the Constituent Assembly would be illegal and stated that it would not participate in such a move. (Note: The opposition's claim has merit since the law that convoked the Constituent Assembly states that Sucre is the official site of the Constituent Assembly. End Note).

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How will Security Forces Respond?

17. (SBU) Opposition congressional members told poloffs on September 6 that they doubted the armed forces would intervene in the looming September 10 conflict. The current thinking is that the armed forces might be called in after the conflict to restore order, and keep opposing factions separated. (Comment: Senior members of the armed forces are generally reticent to become engaged in such a conflict, especially since the events of October 2003. Senior officers fear only the military, not politicians, will be blamed (prosecuted) for any injuries or deaths resulting from their actions in an internal conflict. End Note).

18. (SBU) The police, on the other hand, have already been active in Sucre trying to maintain order. More radical elements that support the Democracy Board's objectives, generally university students, have already shown their propensity to use force and engage the police. On August 31, university students threw a burning tire at the prefecture building. The police using copious amounts of tear gas responded to the students, but also fired on many other peaceful protesters. On September 5, students tried to take over the Gran Mariscal Theater, site of the Constituent Assembly. Using tear gas yet again, the police successfully repelled the students. On September 6, confrontations between police and radical students continued. Hospitals in Sucre reported treating over 80 people from the side effects of tear gas, and another 24 injuries resulting from police pellets.

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Comments

19. (C) Despite warnings by the Catholic Church and the Human Rights Ombudsman, both organizations which have served as mediators in prior Bolivian conflicts, of the potential for serious violence, neither the government's supporters nor the opposition are backing down. As tensions mount President Evo Morales has reportedly postponed his trip to Venezuela over the weekend.

110. (C) The MAS proposal to move the Constituent Assembly to Oruro (or perhaps Potosi) will only deepen the divisions between the MAS and opposition. Such a move, would certainly further antagonize Sucre, and push the department of Chuquisaca deeper into the opposition camp. For weeks rumors have circulated that the MAS wants to approve its draft of the constitution using its simple majority. Oruro would provide a friendly site for this scenario, but in the end the Constituent Assembly would lose all legitimacy.

111. (C) The latest government accusation of a "Nacion Camba" plot to use Sucre and the Constituent Assembly as means to topple Evo Morales and install Rene Joaquin as president has several likely motives. It will certainly fire up Morales' supporters, many of whom are converging on Sucre. It is also a pre-emptive accusation that allows Morales to finger the opposition as responsible for whatever violence that does occur in Sucre. Finally, the "plot" indirectly serves to discredit Joaquin, an indigenous leader of Quechua descent, who is viewed as a possible contender to Morales in the next presidential election. End Comment.
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